

# Reformed communiqué

Articles in Deutsch, English, Español, Français

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## Kommunionsdialog mit Anglikanern wird durch den indigenen Kontext geprägt

Die jüngste Zusammenkunft des Internationalen Reformierten-Anglikanischen Dialogs (IRAD) zwischen der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen (WGKR) und der Anglikanischen Gemeinschaft wurde auch diesmal wieder zum Teil durch den lokalen Kontext bestimmt.

Wie bei den vorangegangenen Tagungen des Dialogs (in Indien, dem Vereinigten Königreich und Südafrika) gab der lokale Kontext sowohl willkommene als auch notwendige Einblicke in die wesentlichen Fragen, die derzeit erörtert werden und sich auf die *Koinonia* (Kommunion) beziehen.

In Vancouver, Kanada, wurden die Teilnehmer mit einer Zeremonie des Musqueam-Volkes begrüßt, auf dessen Land sie sich trafen. Sie hörten auch Erinnerungen und Erfahrungen von kirchlichen Führern, die aus den Ureinwohner-Völkern der Cree und Gitksan stammen.

Die kanadischen Kirchen schreiten voran auf dem Weg von der kolonialen Unterdrückung der indigenen Bevölkerung zur Versöhnung. Im kanadischen Kontext war der Verlust von *Koinonia* mit dem Land und der Schöpfung sowie zwischen den Völkern eine akute Tatsache, die bezeugt wird. Aber dennoch, durch das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes, gab

es Zeugnisse der Heilung und neue Hoffnungshorizonte.

Am Sonntag, den 26. August, nahmen die IRAD-Teilnehmer an einem Gottesdienst im Longhouse Council of Native Ministry der Ver-



einigten Kirche von Kanada in East End Vancouver teil, einem Dienst, zu dem auch indigene Menschen gehören. Zu ihnen gesellten sich auch die Ko-Vorsitzenden des Dialogs zwischen der Canadian Anglican Church und der United Church of Canada, die die ganze Woche über als Beobachter teilnahmen.

Die Dialogteilnehmer berichten, dass der Themenumfang sowohl spannend als auch herausfordernd war. *Koinonia* wird im Neuen Testament angenommen, um die Gemeinsamkeit von Erbschaft und Berufung

durch den Glauben auf verschiedene Weise voranzutreiben. Es bringt die beiden segensreichen Erfahrungen mit dem Potenzial für mehr ein, aber auch eine scharfsinnige und manchmal ungemein schmerzhaftes Erkenntnis der noch zu überwindenden Distanz—denn Ausgrenzungen und Parteilichkeit bilden sich immer wieder neu heraus.

Die Vorbereitungen für diese Runde des Dialogs bestanden aus der Arbeit an einem ersten Entwurf eines Berichts, der sich auf die vielen und reichen Beiträge stützte, die in früheren Sitzungen rund um das Thema eingegangen waren. Als die Teilnehmer an diesem ersten Entwurf eines Berichts arbeiteten, wurde eine dreiseitige Struktur erkennbar, nämlich:

Woher kommt *Koinonia*? Wie wurde sie verkörpert? Und wie kann *Koinonia* die Prioritäten von Kirche und Welt prägen?

Der Dialog wurde mit einer Abendmahlsfeier in der reformierten Tradition eröffnet und mit einer Abendmahlsfeier in der anglikanischen Tradition abgeschlossen. Die Mitglieder des Dialogs

Fortsetzung auf Seite 2

# New intern brings passion for justice



**A**bigail Scarlett is planning to make the most of her year-long internship with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), focusing on key justice issues.

Scarlett, from the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, brings a degree in environmental biology and a passion for women's empowerment to the WCRC.

"I have always liked the idea of linking environmental sustainability to economic growth," she says, noting ways in which smart building design enhances energy savings.

"Apart from the environment my other great passion is women's empowerment," she says. "Since the WCRC embodies that notion along with many other beliefs, I thought it great to work along with them, to learn as much as I could from them—so that I would be able to develop skills in that area."

While she'll get a taste of the depth and breadth of the WCRC's work, most of Scarlett's time will be spent working on projects with Philip Vinod Peacock, executive secretary for justice and witness.

"We had many highly qualified candidates for this position," says Peacock, "and I'm thrilled someone

with Abigail's education, experience and excitement on both ecological and gender justice is able to join us for this next year."

"I am very grateful to have gotten this opportunity," says Scarlett. "I am so excited for the new experience that I will have and the new people that I will meet this year."

Besides her passion for justice, Scarlett has been actively involved as president of her church's youth fellowship, as a praise and worship leader and as a Sunday school teacher for seven- to nine-year-olds.

She began her time at the WCRC's offices in Hannover at the beginning of September, and is also looking forward to "the exotic culture in Germany, especially the food" and learning sufficient German to communicate.

The WCRC's internship programme is made possible through contributions by the *Evangelisches Missionswerk, Reformierte Kirchen Bern-Jura-Solothurn* and member churches. ●

## Kommunionsdialog mit Anglikanern

Fortsetzung von Seite 1

haben morgens und abends gemeinsam gebetet. Diese vierte Dialogrunde wurde großzügig von der WGRK ausgerichtet. Die Gastfreundschaft der *Vancouver School of Theology* wurde sehr geschätzt.

Der IRAD traf sich vom 24. bis 30. August an der *Vancouver School of Theology* unter der Leitung der Ko-Vorsitzenden Elizabeth Welch (WGRK) und Howard Gregory (Anglikanische Kommunion). Das nächste IRAD-Treffen ist für August 2019 in Hiroshima, Japan, geplant.

Teilnehmer der anglikanischen Gemeinschaft: Howard Gregory, Kirche in der Provinz Westindien; Clint Le Bruyns, Anglikanische Kirche des südlichen Afrikas; James Hawkey, Kirche von England; Renta Nishihara, Anglikanische Gemeinschaft in Japan; Helene T. Steed, Kirche von Irland; Mitarbeiter: John Gibaut (Ko-Sekretär), Neil Vigers, Büro der Anglikanischen Gemeinschaft.

WGRK-Teilnehmer: Elizabeth Welch, United Reformed Church (Vereinigtes Königreich); Peter Donald, Church of Scotland; Priscille Djomhoué, Vereinte Protestantische Kirche in Belgien; Roderick Hewitt, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa; R. Gerald Hobbs, Vereinte Kirche von Kanada; Aimee Moiso, Presbyterian Church (USA); Royce M. Victor, Kirche von Südinien; Mitarbeiter: Hanns Lessing (Ko-Sekretär); Eri Yoon, Praktikantin der WGRK; C. Nolan Huizenga (Protokoll).

Beobachter: Sandra Beardsall, Vereinte Kirche Kanadas; Lynne McNaughton, Anglikanische Kirche Kanadas. ●

## Service ou hospitalité : veillons à faire la différence

Le service des autres fait partie des priorités de nombreuses communautés religieuses. Mais le fait d'exercer l'hospitalité envers les autres situe le service à un tout autre niveau. Lors d'un colloque de jeunes, le 23 août, à l'Université de théologie protestante d'Amsterdam, la pasteure Najla Kassab, présidente de la Communion mondiale d'Églises réformées, a évoqué « l'hospitalité au long d'un pèlerinage de justice et de paix. »

Ce colloque faisait partie des manifestations relatives au 70<sup>ème</sup> anniversaire du Conseil œcuménique des Églises.

L'hospitalité, estime Kassab, c'est penser aux autres, à ce qu'ils ressentent. « Pour ce qui est du service, nous nous intéressons à ce que nous avons appris tandis qu'avec l'hospitalité, nous nous préoccupons de ce qu'ils ressentent. C'est eux qui sont le sujet de l'hospitalité, pas nous. »

Malheureusement, il se peut que nous rendions service sans pour autant que les gens se sentent heureux, respectés, dignes. « Exercer l'hospitalité, c'est prendre le risque de pénétrer dans un espace différent, je pense que c'est ce risque-là qu'a pris Jésus en s'incarnant dans notre humanité – poursuit Najla Kassab. L'hospitalité ne se

résume pas à des actes, comme la création d'une soupe populaire, d'un café pour réfugiés, d'un lieu pour les nourrir et les héberger – il ne s'agit pas seulement de couvrir d'une tâche à l'autre, mais de voir dans quel esprit on pratique l'hospitalité, voilà ce qui en marque les effets. »

En outre, précise-t-elle, l'hospitalité n'est pas un geste de pitié, elle s'enracine dans notre foi. « Il ne s'agit pas d'une expérience pénible, mais de s'asseoir aux pieds du Seigneur en découvrant l'espace nouveau dans lequel Dieu nous façonne. Sauf à être disposés à passer dans ce nouvel espace, nous ne pourrions pas croître en tant que chrétiens. »

C'est pourquoi tant de jeunes trouvent l'Église monotone et ennuyeuse, a-t-elle dit en conclusion. « Faute de découvrir un espace nouveau où vivre sa foi, on finit par faire le courant, le service, pas l'hospitalité. Nous sommes en pèlerinage, nous espérons y vivre la paix et la justice. Si nous ne vivons pas l'hospitalité, nous ne serons jamais sur le bon chemin, c'est-à-dire sur une route qui nous conduit de la crainte à l'amitié. » ●

— *Conseil œcuménique des Églises*

WCC/Albin Hillert



# GEM School “a powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit”

“**E**conomic and ecological injustice is a faith imperative and it is inseparable from the belief in God.

Concentration of power in the hands of the few is theologically incorrect,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, at the opening of the GEM School in Mexico City.

The Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management (GEM) for an Economy of Life took place in August 2018 in Mexico City. The 10-day programme was attended by church leaders, theologians and activists from diverse backgrounds, inviting churches to actively participate and strengthen its role and voice in the context of global economics.

“We need to put Jesus at the centre of economic justice and to do this is to displace the market system with an economy that is directed towards the needs of people,” said Roderick Hewitt in the keynote address.

The GEM School, a joint initiative of the WCRC, World Council of Churches (WCC) and Council for World Mission (CWM) aims to develop economic literacy within churches by equipping future leaders with a better understanding of churches’ engagement in mission and witness for economic justice. It is part of the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) programme.

“In our unity we are sending an unambiguous message that we need a new international financial and economic architecture grounded in prophetic gospel values of our shared humanity where emphasis is on a life of dignity for all and for the protection of the earth,” said Isabel Apawo Phiri, WCC deputy general secretary.

NIFEA is a joint initiative of the WCRC, WCC, CWM and Lutheran World Federation and stems from the *São Paulo Statement* and *Economy of Life for All Now*, both of which identify the development of competencies in economics within churches as a priority.

NIFEA also comes from the Accra Confession which advocates that the economic and environmental injustices of today’s global economy require the Reformed family around the world to engage injustices as an integral part of their churches’ witness and mission.

Accompanied by an international group of economists and theologians over the course of two weeks, GEM School participants identified, relativized, contextualized and criticized the normative fundamentals and method-



ologies of economics, combining theological and economic dimensions.

“We have ignored the link between theology and economy in Latin America. The GEM School enabled me to find the connection between the two and that is something considerable,” said Cecilia Eugenia, a participant from Chile.

“I would like to see G195 instead of G20 because economic policies affect everyone,” said Pearce Robinson from the United Kingdom.

After an extensive learning phase, the GEM School concluded with presentations developed by the participants: strategic ecclesiological and communications projects for an Economy of Life. Most of the projects developed by the participants revolved around economic competencies using academic programmes, trainings and campaigns to engage the public voice.

“The participants have done an important task of naming the obstacles, and I would be thrilled to see the projects implemented,” said Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, a faculty member from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

The GEM School enabled the participants to get basic understandings of the workings of financial markets and the international financial order in a global context while focused on the developing world. It equipped the participants with the necessary tools to bridge theology and economics and work towards a sustainable global economy.

—Anam Gill

See more about the GEM School on our YouTube Channel: <https://youtu.be/NmUQbbIGU0M>



## Estudiantes de la Escuela GEG ante las injusticias contextuales

Las personas migrantes fueron bienvenidas en ese lugar, así como Jesús hubiese sido bienvenido“, dijo Manasseh Musa, un estudiante de la Escuela GEG, de Nigeria, mientras visitaba Casa Mambré, un centro para inmigrantes en la Ciudad de México.

„Nos ayudó a abrir los ojos el ver un espacio donde todas las personas tienen su sitio, un lugar para el alivio de todas las personas que enfrentan desafíos económicos y políticos, promoviendo la solidaridad unos con otros“, dijo Musa.

El 20 de agosto, los y las participantes de la Escuela GEG fueron invitados a visitar diversos centros para personas indígenas (Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas A.C. (CENAMI)) y para personas migrantes (Casa Mambré), ambos en la Ciudad de México.

Estas visitas de contacto con la realidad ofrecieron conocimiento de primera mano sobre las injusticias económicas y políticas y los desafíos que enfrentan las comunidades indígenas y las personas migrantes en México, lo que posibilita a los y las estudiantes comprender mejor el contexto local en torno al cual se desarrolla la Escuela GEG.

Durante la visita a Casa Mambré, los y las participantes tuvieron ocasión de discernir cómo la migración responde a una variedad de factores económicos, sociopolíticos, culturales y ambientales. La visita proporcionó a los y las participantes una visión de los complejos procesos migratorios a grandes ciudades como la Ciudad de México.

Casa Mambré ha brindado servicios médicos, psicológicos y de asesoramiento a personas migrantes desde 2013. Los y las participantes de la Escuela GEG se reunieron con miembros de la comunidad migrante, los escucharon y conocieron las razones económicas y políticas que llevaron a su decisión de migrar.

„Estaba realmente intrigada por el culto que está teniendo lugar allí para la comunidad LGBTQ“, dijo

Alana Martin, una participante de Canadá. „Me hizo pensar en cuántas personas emigran a causa de su identidad de género. Las razones para migrar son muy variables, pero en ese espacio se ponía énfasis en su bienestar; nadie estaba allí para emitir juicio sobre las otras personas“.

En el centro para los pueblos indígenas, los y las participantes se reunieron con José Luis Sánchez García, secretario de CENAMI, quien brindó información sobre la tarea cincuentenaria de la organización. Informó a los y las participantes de la Escuela GEG acerca del aumento de las dificultades económicas que enfrentan los pueblos indígenas en México, una de las poblaciones indígenas más grandes y diversas de América Latina.

„Un pozo petrolero vale hoy más que las vidas de las personas indígenas“, dijo. „Para extraer petróleo, el gobierno simplemente desplazará a las comunidades indígenas. Buscamos ayudar a estas personas tratando de encontrar lagunas en las leyes existentes en el país“.

La visita a CENAMI ofreció a los y las participantes un entendimiento de la historia de la comunidad indígena en México y cómo la colonización ha moldeado y definido su cultura actual y sus desafíos económicos.

„Si buscamos la economía de la vida, la importancia de que hayamos visitado CENAMI es sintonizar con las realidades de las que provienen nuestros hermanos y nuestras hermanas de diversos orígenes“, dijo Pearce Robinson, participante del Reino Unido. „Es necesario adquirir esta experiencia personal, y sentarnos con las personas y descubrir cómo la injusticia económica les afecta y cómo podemos trabajar con ellos y ellas hacia una economía de la vida“.

La Escuela GEG es una iniciativa conjunta del Consejo para la Misión Mundial, la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas y el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias.

—Anam Gill

# Ordaining Women: A Powerful Force for Justice

*The WCRC is particularly committed to gender justice and the just and full participation of women in all areas of church and society. The 2017 General Assembly adopted “The Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women” (see next pages) and pledged to journey with those members who do not yet ordain women. The ordination of women is not just about having more women in the ministry; rather it’s about recognizing that including women in ministry and as equals in church leadership will create a powerful force for social and economic justice throughout the world. This is one in a series of articles on women in ministry highlighting these beliefs.*

## “For God to have flesh on comes through the womb of a woman”

“I feel very blessed to get to live the life I live. If I were in a different geographical context, if I had grown up in a different denomination, if I had grown up in a different time—even if I had been born into a different family—I would likely not be able to live the life that I am living right now. I would not be able to be a pastor of a congregation where I am the age of many of their children or grandchildren perhaps and be welcomed,” said Sabrina Slater, a pastor in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Slater, currently serving a church in New York state, shared that she did not grow up thinking she would become a minister. Neither of her parents are ministers, but she grew up in a family that took faith very seriously. She has a degree in cognitive science with a minor in health and human development, and while working in student services at a university she obtained a Masters of Education.

Working at the university Slater had the opportunity to blend her work and faith life by helping to take some students to Kenya and look at HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. And intersecting her work with faith she went on an adult mission trip, serving briefly with Mercy Ships, an international charity organization that provides humanitarian aid.

“Through those experiences I felt God tugging a bit for me to be not just in higher education but to do something new, and I didn’t necessarily know what. But I happened to be working at a church that had a



woman pastor who looked a bit like me, and I agreed with her theology, and it was from that I learnt about the Master of Divinity degree, which I had never heard about. And I thought it would be fantastic: you can just study about God in a university,” shared Slater.

Keeping in prayer her calling she took on this journey. “I didn’t desire it, but I did think and pray about it. And as much as I was not interested in taking Greek or Hebrew, I figured if we say yes to God and where God is leading us that would be a right response,” said Slater.

As a student at Princeton Theological Seminary she had the opportunity to travel and have different experiences, hearing a variety of voices, including in Israel and Palestine, Cuba, Brazil, India and South Africa, along with the courses she was taking.

Having the opportunity to study with people from different denomi-

nations and cultural contexts it was eye opening for Slater to hear the reasoning for why women can and cannot be ordained. According to her it is located differently depending on which denomination you belong to.

“We have to be aware of the conversation and how it is being held in order to engage in it, and our points of reference are different depending which church family we are coming from. It is a useful point of reference to not have the conversation about ordination as something as a right because not everyone is called to be ordained. That pastoral role we are discussing here is not everyone is called to be a pastor. God might and does call anyone who is being baptized, and that is an invitation to all. So, who are we to get in the way in the movement of the Holy Spirit?” said Slater.

When asked what message she has for women facing challenges on their journey to being a minister she said, “To all the women facing challenges on their way, God sees you, God loves you and God has given you everything you need to be a blessing in your context in this world. Your voice is important and necessary and if there is not a space for you at the Communion table at the Eucharist then there is not a space for any of us. Women are enough, and it is not a little thing that it would be a woman through which Jesus Christ would come to us. For God to have flesh on comes through the womb of a woman; that is powerful.”

—Anam Gill

# A Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination

**A Declaration of Faith:** God, through the Holy Spirit, calls both women and men to participate fully in all the ministries of the church.

This declaration testifies to our belief that women and men were created equally in the image of God and that they therefore should be treated with equal respect and dignity. It testifies to the profound unity of all who have been baptized. It testifies to our experience over centuries that God has been calling both women and men to ministries of spiritual leadership and granting them the gifts and graces to carry out those roles. In some of the cultural contexts in which our churches live today, this declaration goes against the prevailing ethos. Thus faithful Christians are often called to be counter-cultural. Theological integrity and justice require that the churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in solidarity courageously declare their commitment to assure that both women and men have equal standing to reflect their common incorporation into the body of Christ in baptism and service.

The churches of the WCRC now pledge that our common practice will be to welcome into ordained ministry women who experience that call and who demonstrate the gifts necessary for leadership and service in church ministries. Their placement and any compensation will be determined on the same basis as for men.

## The Context

*Why do we make this declaration now?*

The women's pre-assembly at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA (2010), through its commitment to full partnership between women and men, affirmed both the need to work towards a binding commitment of the Communion to the ordination of women, and also the need to achieve equal representation of women and men on the Executive Committee.

The Uniting General Council then affirmed women's ordination as central to the understanding of communion, stating: "True unity cannot be realized in a context where the call of God to women to actualize their gifts in the ministry of Word and Sacrament is not recognized."<sup>1</sup> Among the recommendations approved by the WCRC General Council was a commitment to "...promote the ordination of women amongst its member churches."<sup>2</sup> To achieve these mandates, we believe we have to work toward a declaration of faith, and this document attempts to address this issue.

The brutality of the treatment of women across the world today reflects a long-standing view in some cultures that women are by nature inferior to men, born to serve and obey men, that the girl is less valuable than the boy, that women deserve neither respect nor dignity. We see that the girl and the mother are often the last in the family to be fed and are the least educated, so that their life possibilities are limited. We see mass rape of girls and women used as a weapon of war with appalling consequences. We see women forbidden to leave their homes and take part in the wider life of society. Even in highly developed nations, women are paid less for the same work than men, sometimes have restricted access to healthcare and are rarely fully represented in national governing structures.

Churches rightly protest assaults on the human rights of women, but their moral authority is compromised when they demonstrate by their institutional life that they, too, believe in the inferiority of women and their incapacity to serve as ordained church leaders. The churches' refusal to ordain women is experienced by them as painful oppression, robbing them of their proper dignity. Even when the women have been ordained, they often face discrimination and marginalization.

The churches of the Reformed family today, spanning the globe and rooted in diverse cultures, have the opportunity and the obligation to witness before the world that women and men alike are created in the image of God, deserve equal respect and dignity, and can find in the institutional life of the church an affirmation of those beliefs. The ordination of women is a powerful witness to the equality of women and men in the eyes of God. It is also an expression of gratitude for women's rich gifts of leadership that invigorate the life of the churches.

## The Biblical Foundation: Creation and New Creation

The Bible, foundation of Reformed belief and practice, has been used to support both the approval and disapproval of women's ordination. The Bible in fact both reflects and challenges the patriarchal world in which it was written, prompting us to define a hermeneutical lens through which to interpret the Bible. Reformed Christians generally read the Bible in the light of the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, aided by critical biblical scholarship and rigorous reflection and discernment in the community of faith, upheld by prayer. This approach to discerning God's will avoids simply studying and citing isolated texts. God's grace for the whole of creation leads us to approach the Bible embracing mercy, justice and liberation in the face of the fallen world and structures of

<sup>1</sup> Record of Proceedings, United General Council 2010, Grand Rapids, USA, p.160

<sup>2</sup> Idem

oppression. Galatians 5:1: “For freedom, Christ has set us free.” There has been a fundamental shift in critical scholarship that has supported a renewed understanding of the equality proclaimed in the Gospel. This has guided us in our firm conviction that the ordination of women is a fully biblical imperative. We will sketch the basis of that belief, focusing on two texts: Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28.

**Creation:** Genesis 1:27-28: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (NRSV).

Fundamental to our understanding of the proper role of women is this verse, announcing at the very beginning of the biblical narrative that women and men together are created in God’s image. This is a statement of equality and solidarity. Neither here nor in the following verse’s charge to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth is there any suggestion of division of labor by sex or of women’s subordination.

Opponents of women’s ordination often point to Genesis 2:18: “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (NRSV). The term “helper” has been seen as a sign of subordination. In the Hebrew, however, the word carries the opposite connotation. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures the same word often describes God creating and saving Israel, a source of strong support. The recognition by the man in Genesis 2:23 that the woman is “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” is again a declaration of mutuality and solidarity.

We reject theologies that teach that women are by their biological nature inferior to men, or that women reflect the image of God less fully than men, or that women’s proper role is limited to procreation and the domestic realm, excluding them from taking public responsibility within creation.

God’s intention at creation is equality and solidarity between women and men in harmony with all creation. After the fall both the woman and the man experience distortion of those relationships. In Genesis 3:16, the woman hears that she should be subject to her husband as punishment for sin, and the man is punished by the cursing of the land and his labor. The biblical narrative continues then to portray a patriarchal society. Jewish women in the Hebrew Scriptures rarely appear in official

leadership. We do read of Queen Esther and of Deborah the judge, and of prophets like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Noadiah. A rich succession of able women nonetheless pervades the biblical text, such as the clever Hebrew midwives in Egypt, and the beloved Ruth with her own book.

**New Creation:** Galatians 3:27-28: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV).

The ministry of Jesus portrays many challenges to the oppressive practices of society, where public contact between women and men was strictly regulated. For example, he intervened against stoning of the woman taken in adultery. He allowed the hemorrhaging woman to touch his garment, and he healed her. He was surrounded by both women and men as disciples and empowered them in life and ministry. He taught about the reign of God that was already beginning among them and that would upend the current way of life. His intimate friendships with Mary and Martha permitted them to engage in theological conversation. He accepted the Syro-Phoenician woman’s challenge to his understanding of his mission, and yielded to her plea to heal her daughter. He crossed the conventional boundary by engaging in a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, talking with her at length, and enabling her to return to her community and minister by sharing the good news. His interaction with Mary Magdalene transformed her into a faithful disciple who witnessed the resurrection. After his resurrection, he appeared to women disciples and sent them to tell the others that he lived. These examples demonstrate the countercultural nature of Jesus’s ministry and indicate the value and significance Jesus gave to women in ministry.

In the band of disciples that gathered in Jerusalem to pray after Jesus’ resurrection were “certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14, NRSV). All were present at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Peter, addressing the people of Jerusalem to explain how the resurrected Jesus was the Messiah, took his text from the prophet Joel: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18, NRSV; cf. Joel 2:28-9). In this new era of the reign of God where the Spirit has been poured out, women will have a far more egalitarian role than before.

So it should not surprise us to read in the book of Acts about women prophets like the daughters of Philip, about Priscilla with her husband teaching the preacher Apollos and accompanying Paul on his journey, risking their necks for him, he says, and about the women hosting house churches. Paul speaks warmly and gratefully about his women colleagues in ministry: among them Junia the apostle; Phoebe, the minister (or deacon) of the church of Cenchreae; Priscilla and Mary. Some had been jailed with him (Romans 16:1-16). The widows who cared for the poor (I Timothy 5) were understood by John Calvin to be part of the office of deacon. There are many records in the early centuries of the ordained women deacons.

It is in the context of the new creation, where the Holy Spirit calls those least expected to give leadership, that we read Galatians 3:27-28 as part of an ancient baptismal rite. All who are called into faith and baptized into Christ's body have become one family where human barriers accepted by society must fall. We know from the book of Acts how difficult a struggle it was for those early Christians to accept that the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, previously sanctioned by religion, had been broken by the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet a clear decision was made that Gentiles given the gift of faith must be accepted into the community without circumcision. Some of our churches were still struggling in the late nineteenth century with the implications of that phrase "no longer slave or free," but the teaching of the Bible eventually led them to decide that slavery was morally wrong and that Christians could not be slave-holders. It took another century for some of our churches to understand that the racial barrier has also been broken by the Holy Spirit, and there can be no racially segregated churches. Our Reformed family at the WARC General Council in Ottawa in 1982 declared that apartheid (which had extended to church structures) is sin, and justifying it morally and theologically is "a travesty of the Gospel, and in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy."

We now are at a moment in history when our churches must declare that among the baptized there is no longer male and female. This means that men can no longer be exclusively privileged with church leadership.

### **Experience in the Life of the Church**

Women lost their equality with men in the Church in the early centuries as the house churches moved out into public spaces, and the Church became institutionalized. Theologians living in the dualistic thought of the Hellenistic world lost the Hebraic belief in the goodness of creation. They adopted from Greek philosophy and

Roman law unbiblical views of the subordination and inferiority of women. Thomas Aquinas, for example, adopted Aristotle's view of women as defective males, damaged in the process of gestation. Apart from some women deacons in the East who marched with the clergy in the early middle ages, the only official role available to medieval women in the church was that of a nun; but some nuns did exercise remarkable influence. Christine de Pisan, a lay woman, set off around 1400 a centuries-long literary debate about the nature of women in which she challenged the theologians' assumptions. Marie Dentiere in the early years of the Reformation in Geneva took up this debate, insisting that the liberating Gospel called on women to speak and write, and she did. She asked, "Are there two gospels, one for men, another for women?" Women writing in this tradition pointed out the varied roles of women in the New Testament, reading the Bible very differently than either Catholic or Protestant male theologians. Attempts were made to silence these women.

Luther's Reformation, honored in 2017 at its 500th anniversary, gave to all of Protestantism the concept of the priesthood of all believers, the right of all the baptized to stand before God to pray for one another and to teach one another divine things, declaring God's gracious love and forgiveness to one another. This priesthood is distinct, however, from public ministry on behalf of a congregation. Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians repudiated the Aristotelian view of women, gave greater dignity to marriage, and even encouraged women to join congregational singing in public worship. Nonetheless they did not understand the priesthood of all believers to undermine the tradition of exclusively male clergy carrying out public ministry. After five hundred years, it is time for us to declare that a full understanding of the priesthood of all believers calls for equality of women and men in public ministry as well.

The ordination of women already has a long-standing tradition in the Reformed family. The Congregationalists have been ordaining women ministers since 1853, when Antoinette Brown became the first woman Congregational minister. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordained Louisa Woosley in 1889, but no other Presbyterians followed for many years. There have been women deacons since at least the late 19th century, and women elders since at least the 1930's. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, increasing numbers of Reformed churches around the world have been regularly ordaining women as ministers, elders and deacons, and today most do so. Therefore, we have abundant evidence that women in diverse cultures on every continent can

become fine theologians and have fruitful ministries. Our churches have confirmed through their experience with faithful women leaders that God is indeed calling women to ordained ministries and through them strengthening the churches.

Through history and in the present there is a disturbing recurrent experience in churches that do not ordain women. It is the disjunction of ordination from the practice of functions ordinarily related to ordained ministry. In all our churches women carry out tasks that churches with Presbyterian governance typically assign to elders and deacons; yet where ordination of women is refused, women carry out those tasks without the authority of office, without the ability to participate in the decision-making of governing bodies, and without the collegial support of ordained colleagues. In unusual situations of flux and transition, where pastors are scarce, where men are at war, on the mission field and in remote locations, able women are also called to exercise pastoral functions. They organize churches, lead public worship, preach, lead and teach in theological schools, and provide pastoral care. Yet even if they are theologically educated, they, too, lack the authority of office, participation in governing bodies, and collegial support, and they cannot offer the sacraments. They are also paid much less than pastors. The Reformed tradition has closely tied ordination to the functions of ministry. If women are trusted to carry out the functions of ministry, they should be ordained. This is a matter of faith and of justice.

When surveyed, most of our member churches that do not ordain women do not cite theology as the reason but culture. Some live in contexts where secular society does not accept women's leadership. Some are minorities in predominantly Roman Catholic or Orthodox countries and feel ecumenical pressure to refrain from actions their neighbors find offensive. These cultural pressures are significant and sometimes life threatening. The Church throughout its history has faced such challenge in its struggle to make a faithful witness in the world. The WCRC needs to accompany these churches in solidarity. In Christ we are called to be a new creation, transcending the oppressive aspects of culture.

Since the Seoul General Council of WARC in 1989, general councils have been calling on the churches to re-examine their practice if they do not ordain women and developing ways to assist them in this process. Those churches that do ordain women have been asked to study whether women ministers have equal access to placement opportunities and equal pay for equal work. The survey made by the office of partnership between women and men in 2009 (WARC) presented not very precise infor-

mation since all churches did not respond properly. It showed that at least 42 churches do not ordain women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Those churches are distributed as follow: Europe 7, Africa 18, Middle East 3, Latin America 5, Asia 9. From 2010 until now we have not been able to elicit a clear response from the member churches, though the regional councils that allow us to update these figures point out that those numbers are still valid.

We now seek to live out our commitment to communion and justice as we make this common Declaration of Faith, praying: Living God, renew and transform us!

*—Adopted by the 2017 General Council in Leipzig, Germany*

# Hope drives Iraqi churches

The strength of hope continues to drive the few remaining Presbyterian churches in Iraq, a World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) delegation found on a recent visit.

“Although they are very few, they have a vision of hope where they see their role in society as something very vital,” said Najla Kassab, WCRC president.

The delegation—composed of representatives from the WCRC, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, Presbyterian Church (USA) and Synod of the Nile—spent more than a week in October visiting with the leaders and churches of the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Iraq (NEPCI), which are not yet members of the WCRC, in three different cities.

“One of our main goals of this solidarity visit was to help pastors and elders sit together and start to think about their needs as churches—and the role they can play in supporting one another and empowering the ministry of these three churches,” said Kassab.

They face many challenges, including societal corruption, high emigration, and leadership development. The WCRC’s three member churches each offered assistance to address some of these issues, most especially leadership development and reconnecting to the world.

These offers were welcomed, as was a strong affirmation from Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, that there was a place for the Iraqi churches in the Communion. “Hope thrives through relationships,” said Ferguson.

Farouk Hammo, NEPCI president, said that they were looking to the WCRC not for mere support for their ministry programmes, but to belong to a global family of churches so as to enhance their standing in Iraq.

“This is about building bridges with other churches, especially in the Middle East, sharing the pain and the vision and the hope with these churches,” said Kassab. The inclusion of Middle Easterners in the delegation was thus key. “We could relate very easily to similar contexts.”

Kassab’s presence as both a Middle Easterner and a woman created an unexpected opportunity: she was invited to join a church ministry’s visit to a women’s prison in Kirkuk. The church provides basic necessities to the imprisoned women—along with several babies who were born in the prison—including milk, diapers, candy, doors to bathrooms and air-conditioners.

“The prisoners welcomed me and asked me to sit on the mattress on the floor near them. They accepted me as one of them even for a few minutes,” said Kassab. “Sitting near them raised in my mind many questions of injustice that women face. Their worried eyes showed how hard it is to reach their troubled souls. The church in Kirkuk was the sign of hope to them even in small steps.”

Despite their small sizes, the three churches run extensive programmes and projects. Besides the prison ministry, their work includes radio stations, refugee housing, water provision, a community gym and daycares, nurseries and kindergartens.

“They challenged us on how we understand the mission of the church,” said Kassab. “They feel they will continue on this outreach to society. We sensed the leaders are respected by the different groups we met because they were ready to live their faith outside the walls of the church.”

At their final meeting prior to leaving Iraq, the delegation agreed to continue to coordinate efforts to bolster the work of the Iraqi churches, including the possibility of holding a consultation on reconciliation, peace and justice in Kirkuk—an invitation made by the governor of Kirkuk.





## Traci Blackmon: people of faith must not be silent

Christians have a moral responsibility to speak out and teach people to say no to racism, xenophobia, exclusion and discrimination.

That conviction was at the heart of a Rome conference which brought together representatives of many different churches, including WCRC members, to find ways of combating the racism and populist nationalism that is on the rise in many countries today. The 18-20 September encounter was jointly organized by the World Council of Churches and the Vatican's Office for Integral Human Development.

Among the participants speaking out most passionately about the need for a renewed commitment on the part of the churches was Traci Blackmon, pastor of a parish in St Louis, Missouri. She's well-known nationally throughout the USA as head of the Justice and Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ, a WCRC member, and a leader of the Black Lives Matter movement.

She noted that while some people believe the church should not get

involved in politics, she believes the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem was "both a holy and political act." The entire Jesus story is "one of human terror and divine mercy," she said, since God "became human in the form of one who was vulnerable, poor and displaced in order to unveil the injustice of tyrannical power."

Urging the church to be political but not partisan, Blackmon insisted that "Jesus had more in common with the children of refugees born today than we might like to imagine." Criticizing the current US government's policy of almost halving the number of refugee admissions, she said the church must "recapture its prophetic zeal" and speak out against harmful policies or risk becoming "an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority."

Blackmon also denounced the ways in which previous US governments oppressed and enslaved indigenous and immigrant people in past centuries, stressing that the church has been "complicit in the promulgation of religious rhetoric that favours some of God's creation over others." Immigration policy in the US, she declared, "is not as much about safety as it is about separatist ideology" and people of faith must not be silent.

Speaking after her powerful presentation to the conference, Blackmon insisted that the churches do have the power to combat racism and xenophobia—if they act in a more united way. The church is where people get their theological grounding, she said, and it is there where they must be taught that "any oppression of people that limits their ability to be all that God designed them to be is wrong."

Rather than confronting people on social media or other hostile environments, Blackmon said, church leaders can connect with them personally at parish level as "people whose children you baptize, whose family members you marry and you bury."

You're not going to convince everyone, she concluded with a smile, but through the church we can educate the masses of people who elect our political leadership and have the power in their vote to make changes.

—*World Council of Churches*

*Thomas K. Oommen, moderator of the Church of South India, visits with flood victims and relief workers.*



## Communion Concerns

### Flooding in Kerala, India

Sisters and brothers in Kerala, India, were hit by devastating monsoon floods, killing dozens and displacing thousands over the summer. Educational institutions and religious buildings including churches were destroyed and regular life was brought to a standstill. People are faced with the stark reality that it will be a huge task for most of them to bring their life back to normalcy.

Organizations under the six dioceses of the Church of South India are active in the relief work. The WCRC's Reformed Partnership Fund responded with emergency funds to assist in these efforts. Please join us in prayer and support for them as the recovery continues.

### Earthquake and tsunami in Sulawesi, Indonesia

On the evening of Friday, 28 September 2018, the cities of Palu and Donggala in Central Sulawesi were hit by a magnitude 7.4 earthquake. The earthquake triggered a tsunami along coastal areas in Palu and also in Donggala.

WCRC members, the Indonesian Protestant Church of Donggala (*Gereja Protestan Indonesia di Donggala* (GPID)) is based in Palu, while the Christian Church in Central Sulawesi (*Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah* (GKST)), Indonesian Christian Church Synod (*Sinode Gereja Kristen Indonesia* (GKI)) and Toraja Church (*Gereja Toraja* (GT)) have congregations in Palu and other affected areas.

The ACT Alliance has issued an alert to raise funds for relief efforts, the WCRC Reformed Partnership Fund is providing emergency funds and many member churches are also contributing through their relief arms.

### Unrest in Cameroon

Social and political conflicts between the anglophone and francophone areas of Cameroon have resulted in a human rights and humanitarian crisis. Member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) are being impacted even as they work for peace and call for dialogue, non-military solutions, a halt to repression and full respect for human rights.

The WCRC stands in solidarity with its member churches in Cameroon—Evangelical Church of Cameroon (*Église évangélique du Cameroun*), Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Presbyterian Church of Cameroon (*Église presbytérienne camerounaise*) and Protestant Church of Africa (Lolodorf) (*Église protestante africaine* (Lolodorf)).

The WCRC calls on the Communion and sisters and brothers around the world to uphold these churches in prayer, inform themselves about the situation and call on their national governments to hold the Cameroon government accountable, respecting human rights for all. The WCRC also calls for the international community to intervene, seeking peaceful, dialogue-based solutions to this challenging historic, social and political issue.

### Election in Brazil

Aginaldo Pereira Gomes, AIPRAL president, has called for prayers for Brazil as a “deep polarization divides our people” during the presidential election campaign. “Our democracy is at risk and our people are divided. Most evangelical churches support the candidate of extreme right, even when his speech is about hate and violence, contrary to the principles of the Gospel of Jesus. We live days of darkness and fear.”

# Communion News



## ACRC elects new leaders

The African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC) met as an assembly at the end of June, setting its priorities (based on the new WCRC strategic plan) and electing new leadership: Coordinator West Africa: Paulina Afful-Arthur; Coordinator East Africa: Martin M. Wanjala; President: Uma Agwu Onwunta; Vice-President: Pauline Kanuthu Mwaura; General Secretary: Lungile Mpetsheni; Treasurer: M. Koku Mawulikplimi Amega; Coordinator Central Africa: Mukendi Isaac Kalonji; Coordinator Southern Africa: Gustav Claassen.



## Tumekutana 2018

WCRC President Najla Kassab attended the 2018 Tumekutana conference, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, under the theme, “Woman: You are the Image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Tumekutana, a Swahili word meaning “we have come together” is the gathering of Presbyterian and Reformed women leaders from across Africa for a time of fellowship, prayers and sharing. In her presentation, Kassab said, “Women are created in the image of God, and we will be held accountable to live up to our calling. We are created to show the Glory of God in our life and stewardship, to reflect God’s Love.”



## Hong-Jung Lee accompanies South Korean president to summit

The next steps toward peace on the Korean Peninsula were taken during South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s three-day summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un in September. They agreed to continue to pursue a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Peninsula and conclude a peace treaty, among other important decisions.

Hong-Jung Lee, a WCRC executive committee member and general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, was a part of the south’s delegation, providing spiritual care along the way, which included a visit to Paektu Mountain, in which sits Heaven Lake (pictured).

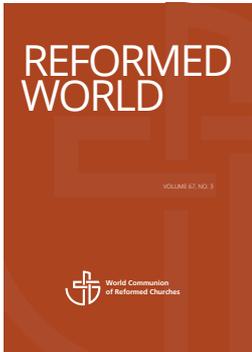


## Gender Policy Group

The 2017 General Council instructed the WCRC to develop a Gender Justice Policy by 2019. This policy will delineate issues of gender-based violence within church and society and will include an action plan for its implementation and accountability. A Gender Policy Working Group is at work drafting the policy, meeting in Hannover in September.

Members of the group present marked #ThursdaysInBlack, working towards a world without rape or violence—Lungile Mpetsheni, Peggy Mulambya Kabonde, Patricia Sheerattan Bisnauth, Un Hey Kim, Hannah May North, Abigail Scarlett and Philip Vinod Peacock (WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness).

### Reformed World now available



The third issue of volume 67 of *Reformed World*, featuring essays by students from the 2017 Global Institute of Theology, has recently been released—and is also available for free download from the WCRC website ([wcrc.ch/theology/reformed-world](http://wcrc.ch/theology/reformed-world)). The next edition will appear in 2019, as the theological journal is incorporated into the new WCRC strategic plan.



### G20 Interfaith Forum

Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, and Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness, were just two of the many participants who gathered in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for the G20 Interfaith Forum, 25-27 September. The overarching theme for the forum was “Building Consensus for Fair and Sustainable Development: Religious Contributions for a Dignified Future.” Over three days, presentations, panel discussions, and group sessions worked to build networks and develop concrete policy recommendations for the G20 Summit at the end of November.

### Theology in Colombia



General Secretary Chris Ferguson, along with Mark Hathaway, delivered a series of lectures at the Reformed University in Barranquilla, Colombia, as part of an international seminar at the end of August. The university also launched the book *Semper Reformanda*, which contains a number of essays, including three lectures given by Ferguson and Jerry Pillay, WCRC past president.

## Passings

### Katie Geneva Cannon



Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, who was active in the justice work of the WCRC, passed away on 8 August.

Born on 3 January 1950 she was the first African-American woman ordained in the United Presbyterian Church (USA) and was a renowned womanist theologian and social ethicist. She was the Anne Scales Rogers Professor of Social Ethics at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, United States of America.

She was the author of several books including *Black Womanist Ethics*, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* and *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*.

Cannon was honoured by the American Academy of Religion for excellence in teaching in 2011. She was also honoured at the recently concluded General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

### Joanne Weil

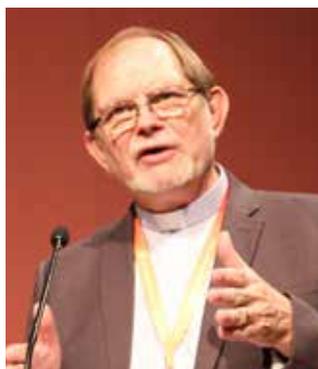


“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matthew 25:23)

Joanne Weil’s life was celebrated at a memorial service on 14

August in Geneva, Switzerland. She passed away on 8 August at the age of 90.

She was for many years the senior assistant at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (a WCRC predecessor organization), serving Edmond Perret and Milan Opočenský and was a “Geneva mother” to many who came to work in the Ecumenical Centre. Raised in the Presbyterian Church (USA), her parents were missionaries in Central America, and she was the widow of Luis Carlos Weil, a former World Council of Churches staff member, serving in various capacities.



Chris Ferguson

## From the General Secretary

# Hope in the darkness

*Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you, for darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.*  
—Isaiah 60:1-2 (NSRV)

**T**he passage from Isaiah is a standard for Advent and Christmas, but it speaks in a particularly direct way this year to our communion of churches. The call is to rise up and witness to the light in a world plunged in bleak despair. The “both and” of hope breaks in precisely where there is no apparent reason to think things could change. The situation is worse on many fronts, and God’s people in our churches are arising to announce and make visible the glory of God. As Irenaeus reminded us, “The glory of God is humanity fully alive.”

The ecumenical community gathered in Rome to address xenophobia, racism and authoritarianism in the context of global migration. In a passionate address Tracy Blackmon of the United Church of Christ called to not back down from the prophetic call to shine on the structural and systemic injustices we are called, with and by God, to transform (see page 12).

As the G20 leaders met in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the G20 Interfaith Forum met in parallel to raise the ethical and spiritual imperative to transform the global economic system that is the engine behind climate injustice, inequity and poverty—speaking truth to power in a world fallen among thieves.

In both cases people of faith rise up in hope to defend and protect the life of people and planet precisely because the situation does not provide any indication that change is likely or possible. Fuelled by the hope of Isaiah as witnessed to by Jesus of Galilee, we find inspiration in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “The time is always ripe to do what is right.” As a gift of faith, the tragedy and despair are our signals to arise and mobilize in the light of the implacable gift of life.

This was never clearer than in our recent visit to Iraq (see page 11). Death, violence and displacement is common to all Iraqis of all faiths and groups. Yet in the midst of the threats, loss and massive migration, the remaining Christians are reaching out as the situation continues to worsen, and crises deepen their concern in witness and service. They understand their presence is needed for the construction of a society of co-existence and for the possibility of peace and reconciliation with respect for diversity. “Arise and shine!”—they heard it, and they did it! But they also call on us to address the root causes of the migration to ensure peace and justice and reconciliation so God’s glory, humanity fully alive in its full diversity, will prosper.

In Manila, WCRC folk visiting the United Church of Christ in the Philippines walked in tough spots to see the work in solidarity with urban impoverished communities and heard the testimony of young people displaced by violence and human rights violations from the island of Mindanao. There was the same rhythm: the people of God rising and shining forth in defense of life, even as the gloom of structural injustice and authoritarianism grows; the hope that comes when the reasons to hope seem far away.

“Darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness the peoples” is an apt description of the moment in which we live, but the WCRC continues to be stirred up and mobilized as we are “called to communion and committed to justice.” We are called to communion to share the suffering and hope in our whole family, a family of churches that is arising so that God’s glory, humanity and earth fully alive, will be fulfilled. After all what less can be said for followers of Jesus who proclaimed in the midst of the bleakest of times, “I have come so that all may have life and life abundant.”

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